

1 Corinthians 14:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.

Analysis

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world—Greek *tosauta genē phōnōn* (τοσαῦτα γένη φωνῶν, "so many kinds of voices/languages"). Paul acknowledges the world's linguistic diversity. **And none of them is without signification** (*aphōnon, ἄφωνον*, "voiceless, meaningless")—every language has meaning to those who speak it.

The argument: every human language is meaningful within its community. The problem with uninterpreted tongues isn't that they lack meaning absolutely, but that they lack meaning to the hearers. Communication requires shared understanding. Tongues are legitimate languages (heavenly or earthly, Paul doesn't specify), but without interpretation, they're functionally meaningless in a gathering where no one understands.

Historical Context

Corinth was a cosmopolitan port city with speakers of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and countless other languages. Paul's point would be obvious: speaking Greek to Latin-only speakers achieves nothing, however eloquent the Greek.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's acknowledgment of linguistic diversity support his argument about tongues?
2. What's the difference between something being meaningful in itself versus meaningful to hearers?
3. How might this principle apply to other forms of communication in worship (music, art, etc.)?

Interlinear Text

τοσαῦτα	εἰ	τύχοι	γένη	φωνῶν	ἐστὶν	ἐν	κόσμῳ	καὶ
so many	G1487	it may be	kinds	of voices	There are	in	the world	and
G5118		G5177	G1085	G5456	G2076	G1722	G2889	G2532
οὐδὲν	αὐτῶν	ἄφωνον·						
none of them	G846	is without signification						
G3762		G880						

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